

REPORT ON DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL CHILD CARE SERVICE

Introduction

1. In January 1966 reports came to your notice about a boy who was said to have received serious injuries while he was in the care of Dorset County Council and boarded out by them. It was alleged that the boy's injuries became known to the council only after he had left the care of the council and had returned to the care of his parents. This raised questions as to the efficiency of the council's arrangements for supervising children in their care. You discussed this with representatives of the council and, with their agreement, you directed me to arrange an urgent inspection of the council's child care service.

2. This inspection took place in February and March and was carried out by five inspectors, including a medical inspector. It took the form of a thorough inspection of the work of the children's department generally, with particular reference to the case of the boy D. The records relating to the boy were carefully examined and the case was discussed with officers of the council's children's department.

3. This report sets out the inspectors' findings and recommendations, in which I concur.

The boy's case

4. The object in this part of the inspection was to consider the facts as known about D's injuries in relation to the quality and regularity of his supervision while boarded out, and the efficiency of the children's department, acting in co-operation with other social services of the county, in furthering his interests while in care. It was not the inspectors' function to enquire into matters which had been the subject of police enquiries leading to criminal proceedings in which a youth pleaded guilty to a charge of maliciously causing grievous bodily harm to D.

The history of the case

5. In September 1955 the Dorset Children's Officer received a notice from the Town Clerk of Poole to say that his council had an eviction order, which they intended to enforce, against D's father, and that there were several children of the family who would become the concern of the children's department. The order was not enforced; D's father paid off arrears of rent.

6. In October 1956 the Children's Officer was notified of an intention to evict the family on 9th November and was informed that there were five children involved, their ages ranging from 19 months to 9½ years. The county Medical Officer of Health urged the Poole Medical Officer of Health to prevent the break-up of the family by action through the Prevention of the Break-up of Families Committee then operating in Poole, but was informed that this was not practicable.

7. The four older children (including D, then aged three years) were received into the care of Dorset County Council on 9th November. The youngest child was placed privately by D's mother but was visited by the child care officer concerned with the other children. D was temporarily boarded out in Poole; his sister was boarded out elsewhere in Poole; the other two children were boarded out in a third foster home in Poole.

8. D was twice visited at his temporary foster home by his child care officer within a few days of his boarding-out. He was an aggressive little boy, who lacked training, and the foster mother was given support and advice on how to manage him. D was medically examined on 29th November and the child care officer paid three more visits in January and February 1957. D was by now clean in his habits but his disobedience and destructiveness persisted and it soon became necessary to find another foster home for him.

9. D was moved on 21st February to another foster home, where he was visited regularly. In view of difficulties caused by visits paid to D by his mother at his first foster home, arrangements were made for the parents to see the boy at the children's department office in Poole but, after a few such visits, D's parents either did not turn up or did not respond to offers to make further appointments.

10. In October 1957 D's foster father asked for his removal. About this time his child care officer left the council's employment and his supervision was taken over by another officer.

11. From October 1957 to March 1958 D lived at the council's reception home, where his needs were assessed with a view to a permanent placing. He was reported as having temper tantrums, to be lacking in affection, and to have poor personal habits. A medical examination in January had mentioned a speech stammer and the need for speech therapy.

12. D was boarded out on 19th March 1958 with the foster parents with whom he remained until he left the council's care in 1964.

13. In the household to which D went in 1958 were two brothers, then aged 18 years and 15 years, both of whom had been boarded out there by Hampshire County Council some years previously. The elder boy was no longer in care; the younger boy was still in care and was being supervised on behalf of Hampshire County Council by D's child care officer. The younger boy was the person convicted in June 1964 of injuring D.

14. D was visited regularly up to the time of his discharge from care in March 1964. For the first five years, that is, until April 1963, the child care officer who had placed him in the foster home continued to supervise him; in April 1963 that officer left the council's employment and another child care officer took over.

15. As required by the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations 1955, the council arranged for the boy to be medically examined annually. The examinations were carried out by the foster parents' family doctor, who reported to the council on each occasion that D's health and condition were satisfactory. At the annual medical examination in May 1961 the foster mother drew the doctor's attention to an injury to the boy's penis, which was thought to have been self-inflicted. This was not mentioned by the doctor in his report to the children's department of the examination, nor did the foster mother say anything to the child care officer about it. The

last medical examination took place just before D returned home. The boy was also examined at school in October 1958 and was seen by doctors on various other occasions which are referred to below.

16. The officers responsible sought to help and advise the foster mother to help D settle in at school. Action was taken when difficulties were reported; for example, following a school report of behaviour difficulties the children's department arranged for D to be seen by a consultant children's psychiatrist in 1961, and there were two further visits to the child guidance clinic in 1962. Difficulties that the foster mother was having with D—of a kind not unusual among children separated from their parents—were discussed with his headmaster and teacher.

17. Eventually, D's parents were re-housed and he was discharged to their care on 26th March 1964. Four days later his child care officer called to see how he was settling down.

18. On 22nd April the Children's Officer received a letter from D's father about an alleged occurrence during D's stay at his last foster home. He asked for an urgent discussion with the child care officer and said that he intended to put the matter in the hands of the police. Later that day the police telephoned the children's department to report an alleged assault on D by the younger of the two brothers referred to in paragraph 13 while they were living in the foster home.

19. The child care officer called on D's parents and was shown an injury to the boy's penis. The child care officer later called on the headmaster of the school which D had attended and discussed the matter with him.

20. On 3rd June 1964 the youth in question appeared before the magistrates on a charge of maliciously inflicting grievous bodily harm upon D; he pleaded guilty.

21. On the following day the Children's Officer reported the case orally to the chairman and vice-chairman of the children's committee.

22. In October 1965 D was committed to the care of Dorset County Council as a fit person after having run away from home on three occasions. His father appealed and the committal order was quashed on 21st January 1966. It was through Press reports of the appeal proceedings that the matter which led to the inspection came to the notice of the public and the Home Office.

Analysis of the case

23. It is not necessary to deal in detail with the quality of supervision or case-work in the period before D's placing in his last foster home, but the children's department's records relating to that period were carefully examined and the inspectors came to the conclusion that supervision and case-work were of a good standard.

24. Special attention was given by the inspectors to the steps leading up to D's placing in his last foster home and to his supervision during the six years he remained there.

25. In two respects the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations were not complied with before D was boarded out in 1958. First, there was no report in writing (as required by Regulation 17(1)(a)) that the home was

likely to meet D's particular needs; secondly, the foster parents were not required to sign the prescribed form of undertaking (which includes an undertaking to inform the council immediately of any serious occurrence affecting the child). However, neither of these omissions was of particular significance in relation to subsequent events, for it is clear from other documents that D's needs were in fact carefully considered in relation to the particular foster parents and their household and that the home was considered to provide the right sort of environment; and the foster parents had for some time cared for children in the care of local authorities and it is reasonable to assume that they would have been aware of their responsibilities. They were, in any event, visited frequently by child care officers and, whether or not an undertaking had been signed, it would be reasonable to expect that any unusual matters affecting D's welfare would be mentioned during the normal course of discussing his behaviour and progress. The council's ignorance of the injury which the foster mother reported to the doctor at D's annual medical examination in May 1961 could not be attributed to their failure to obtain the prescribed undertaking.

26. The inspectors are satisfied that, after D had been placed in the foster home, the children's department complied with those requirements of the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations whose observance would normally be most likely to bring to their notice some bodily injury to or ill-health of a child boarded out by them. The foster home was visited, and the boy was seen alone, by child care officers and, although in one or two instances the interval between visits slightly exceeded the prescribed maximum of two months in the first two years and three months thereafter, the general frequency of visits was considerably in excess of that required by the regulations. The requirements as to annual medical examinations and reports were fully complied with; reference has already been made to other medical examinations.

27. Neither the reports of visits by the child care officers nor the medical reports mentioned any injury to the boy or anything which might reasonably have given grounds for suspecting the existence of the circumstances in which the injury occurred. It is noted, however, that two visits (in October and December 1962) were not reported on in writing.

28. The inspectors were particularly careful to ascertain whether, in the absence of a direct report to the council of any untoward circumstances, there was any factor which ought to have alerted the supervising officers or their senior officers in the children's department to a need for closer investigation. This called for an assessment of the quality of case-work and supervision. It is not possible to relate this assessment to the particular time at which the boy's injury took place, as this is not known. (It has been alleged that repeated assaults causing injury to D occurred over a period, but only one assault, namely that to which the boy's injury was attributed, was the subject of proceedings in 1964; the charge referred to this as having occurred some time between 1st May 1961 and 27th March 1964.)

29. The general supervision of D while boarded out in his last foster home was conscientious and responsible until August 1962, and again from May 1963 until his return home a year later. Each of the supervising

officers concerned was professionally qualified. D's behaviour and progress were regularly reported upon and he was said to have improved during his stay. When difficulties were reported action was taken to enlist the advice of special services of the health and education departments. Difficulties of behaviour were dealt with promptly, except that difficulties which came to notice in January 1962 were not reported on until May. These were attributed by the child care officer concerned and the foster mother to the unsettling effects of meetings with his parents, and his teacher confirmed this opinion.

30. After August 1962 there is an absence of reports until May 1963 and the quality of supervision between these dates cannot be assessed. Visits of supervision are said to have been made. A student who visited the child, and the child care officer who took over in April 1963, commented upon D's lack of companionship, but little could be done about this with a boy of D's age who was otherwise well-settled in his foster home.

31. The reports recorded with regularity that D had his own bedroom. It is not clear whether this statement was on each occasion based on actual inspection of the sleeping arrangements, but the bedroom is known to have been seen on at least three occasions. One of these was in January 1962, when D was in bed, said to be suffering from a cold; his condition was consistent with this and the child care officer ascertained that he had been seen by the doctor.

32. The progress reviews of children boarded out which a local authority are required to carry out every six months, in the light of the reports of supervising officers, medical reports etc., were carried out in D's case, although two (in 1962 and 1963) were a little overdue. With one exception (July 1962), when the review was rather too sanguine in view of the reports received, they provided adequate summaries of the position.

33. Subject to the reservations referred to above, the inspectors reached the conclusion that the Dorset children's department, through its officers, acted responsibly and conscientiously in promoting D's welfare and sought other professional advice as required. Good co-operation was maintained with other departments of the council to ensure that skilled help was made available to deal with the difficulties which D displayed from time to time in his foster home and at school. The quality of supervision was of a reasonably good standard. Visits of supervision were regularly paid in accordance with the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations and, except for one lapse, details of all visits were properly recorded.

34. While D undoubtedly presented certain behaviour difficulties which were known to the council's officers, there was no evidence in his behaviour while in care, or in any other circumstances of the case, that he had been subjected, or was at risk of being subjected, to ill-treatment. In fact he was reported by his teacher to be making progress. When the child care officer discussed the case at the boy's school after the injury became known to the council, he also confirmed that D had always seemed happy with his foster mother. In this connection inspectors discussed with the supervising officer allegations that had been made of undue strictness in the treatment

of the boy, and studied reports that had been made from time to time on his progress in the foster home; they could find no foundation for these allegations.

35. The inspectors then considered whether there was anything the council's officers knew, or ought to have known, about the youth who injured D which should have alerted them to a possible risk. At the time of D's placing the youth was 15 and had been in the foster home for several years. He (and his brother, also in the foster home) had initially been supervised by child care officers of Hampshire County Council, in whose care he was. Dorset County Council took over supervision in 1956 when the youth's foster family moved to Dorset, and, for the six months before D's placing, he had been supervised by the child care officer who had arranged D's placing. This officer continued to supervise the youth until he went out of care at the age of 18; thereafter, until the officer left the council's employment in April 1963, he maintained an interest in the youth's well-being and progress.

36. Supervisory visits were paid at the statutory intervals, and the quality of reporting was satisfactory. Medical examinations were carried out regularly. The child care officer's reports refer repeatedly to the youth and his brother sharing a bedroom, and this is also mentioned in the six-monthly reviews of progress. The child care officers made critical assessments from time to time and these were recorded on the youth's case-papers.

37. In August 1959 the foster mother reported to the child care officer that the youth had threatened her with a stick. The matter is fully dealt with in the officer's report. Apparently, the foster mother, who was ill in bed, had repeatedly called the youth to get ready for work. Things had not gone well at work the previous day and the foster mother's urgent calling had exasperated him. Notwithstanding this explanation of an isolated incident, the child care officer took the trouble to seek psychiatric advice. The psychiatrist reported that the youth was "a simple boy of very dull intelligence . . . There is likely to be childish expression of emotional behaviour but there is no indication of severe lack of control, impulsive drives or hostilities".

38. Apart from this incident, which was rationally explained, and about which expert advice was promptly sought, nothing was recorded about the youth's conduct or behaviour which could have forewarned the council of the circumstances leading to his assault on D.

Action following discovery of the injury

39. After the youth's appearance in court on 3rd June 1964, when he pleaded guilty to a charge of injuring D, the Children's Officer reported the matter orally to the chairman and vice-chairman of the children's committee. Examination by the inspectors of a number of case-papers showed that it was normal practice to make formal reports in writing about any serious complaints, and the inspectors were informed that it was fully intended to follow this practice in this case by reporting it to the next meeting of the children's committee. Most regrettably, this was overlooked. The inspectors also consider it surprising, in view of the seriousness of the

matter, that the case was not mentioned to them on any of their several visits to the Dorset children's department between April 1964 and the end of 1965.

40. A written report was not made to the chairman and vice-chairman of the children's committee until October 1965, when the proceedings referred to in paragraph 22 were taking place, and the matter was not brought before the children's committee until January 1966, after the case had received publicity.

41. One matter that could have been dealt with earlier if the case had been fully considered when the injury became known is the desirability of ensuring that doctors examining a child for the purposes of the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations are fully advised as to the information required in the reports furnished to the council. (Paragraph 15 refers to an injury brought to notice during the medical examination in May 1961 which was not reported to the council.) The children's committee decided, at their meeting on the case in January 1966, to take up this point.

42. The inspectors recommend that all local authorities should be asked by the Home Office to issue such advice. Consideration might also be given to devising a form of medical report which will ensure that any injury or apparent injury, or any abnormality, whatever its apparent cause, is reported to the council.

Parental contacts

43. Inspectors enquired into the arrangements for parental contacts with D while he was in care. There appear to have been substantial gaps between meetings between D and his parents during the latter part of the period when he was in care, and also some delay in dealing with the father's request in 1963 for D's return. The reasons for this are not clear from the records, but the child care officers appear to have had in mind the difficulties about earlier parental visits and meetings (see paragraph 9), and they were uneasy about the stability of the household to which D would be returning.

General review of Dorset's Child Care Service

44. The inspectors enquired into the administration of child care including the statutory records, preventive work, boarding-out, adoption and medical arrangements, and the care of children in Dorset County Council's children's homes. 23 child care officers were interviewed and 43 foster homes containing 76 children were visited in the company of the officers concerned. This number of foster children represents a quarter of all children boarded out by Dorset.

The children's committee

45. Pamela, Lady Digby, has been chairman of the children's committee since May 1954. There are 15 members and seven co-opted members. The Children's Officer is prepared and willing to carry responsibility but it is her conviction that all matters of importance should be reported to the committee. To provide the necessary machinery the committee, acting on the Children's Officer's advice, replaced the two general sub-committees in

January 1963 with three sub-committees to deal with particular aspects of the department's work. A fourth sub-committee which is concerned with preventive work was transferred from the health to the children's committee in 1963. These four sub-committees meet quarterly and provide the machinery for ensuring that all important matters concerning the work of the department can be discussed in detail.

The Children's Officer

46. The Dorset children's department is ably led by Mrs. K. E. Jamieson, who was appointed in September 1955. She is a competent administrator, clear-thinking and direct, and is concerned that every member of her staff should develop a sense of responsibility. There is a generally good corporate spirit in her department.

Numbers in care

47. There were 534 children in the care of Dorset on 31st January 1966. The children's department was responsible, in addition, for the statutory supervision of 290 children, and on a voluntary basis was watching over the welfare of 29 young people who had come to notice. They were also visiting, advising and helping 281 families with children.

Staffing arrangements

48. The work of the children's department has grown considerably as the department has taken on new responsibilities. In recent years the number of children in care has been increasing and the work as an adoption agency has grown; since the coming into operation of section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 the work of preventing children from coming into care and helping families with social problems has developed rapidly. To meet these new and widening responsibilities the number of staff in the children's department has nearly doubled and there are now a children's officer, deputy children's officer, six senior child care officers and 17 child care officers; in addition there are two trainee officers following professional courses. There was a full complement of staff at the time of the inspection but the rapid increase in the number of staff has meant that 17 of the 23 senior child care and child care officers had been in the department for three years or less.

Quality of staff

49. Seven of the 23 members of child care staff hold the full professional qualification and a further five hold a social science or similar qualifications. Aware of the difficulties in attracting professionally qualified officers, the authority have followed since 1964 a scheme of recruitment of trainees for secondment to professional courses. The salaries of all professional officers compare satisfactorily with those offered by other authorities.

Adequacy of staff

50. The burden of work is heavy on the child care officers and case-loads are higher than desirable. The Dorset child care officers are working hard, conscientiously and willingly but under pressure. If they are to retain vigour in their approach to their duties, and their judgment is not to be

impaired by fatigue, and if they are to find new foster parents and not over-burden the ones in use, additional child care officers will be needed. Inspectors consider that an increase of at least three officers is fully justified. In calculating the required number of child care officers inspectors have had to take into account the specialist work of the separate team of four officers who work with families. This team is providing a valuable service for families with social problems but, as mentioned later, the inspectors consider it should not be extended in its present form.

Administrative and clerical staff

51. The department is well served by its administrative and clerical staff. These officers work hard and effectively but under too much pressure. Only one post of general division clerk has been added to the establishment in recent years, in spite of the considerable increase both in the volume of work and in the number of professional staff. Inspectors consider that more staff is needed to ensure that all the administrative details of the child care work are adequately dealt with.

Records

52. The statutory records are in order except that the reason for the termination of boarding-out is not recorded in the boarding-out register. Case files are generally well kept.

Procedural checks

53. The office system for checking that statutory procedures are carried out is satisfactory but it should be extended to cover the completion of the statutory undertaking by foster parents.

Organisation of the child care officers' work

54. A new organisation was introduced in June 1965. The county is now divided into three areas and the child care officers responsible for children in care are divided into three teams each in the charge of a senior child care officer. The three areas cover, respectively, east Dorset and Poole, north Dorset and south Dorset. The child care officers who work with families continue to form a separate team under their own senior preventive officer. A recommendation is made later that this team should be integrated with the area teams.

55. The organisation is still new and certain rigidities persist, but as the senior officers become accustomed to their new responsibilities these rigidities should disappear.

Supervision

56. The supervision which the child care officers receive at present varies in quality and effectiveness. For example, one senior officer is providing supervision and guidance of a high order and is educating his officers into a new awareness of their responsibilities, while another has not yet been released from a heavy case-load to carry out all his new duties. The quality of the child care work will depend to a large extent on the quality of the guidance and supervision which the senior officers can provide.

Decentralisation

57. The new organisation and delegation of responsibilities have laid a satisfactory foundation for the field work. If the service is to be available to give advice and guidance throughout the county the organisation should be extended and placed on a more local basis. At present all officers are based at County Hall and some, especially those covering the north of the county, travel fair distances to their places of work. To reduce travelling and fatigue, to make the service more readily available to the public and to ensure that the child care officers can develop local contacts and work in closer co-operation with local services, accommodation where child care officers can be available should be provided in such centres of population as Blandford, Sherborne and possibly Wimborne and Weymouth. The present arrangement in Bridport, where an advice centre is open in the health clinic for two hours each week, could be extended. In Poole a fully decentralised area office should be opened. The volume of work arising in Poole is considerable and the town has special needs which are not being met by the limited use the department has made since 1955 of two rooms in the registrar's office.

Preventive work

58. Preventive work has been developed vigorously. It has developed from two sources and is still carried out by two sets of officers. The child care officers who have been doing preventive work since 1959 work diligently in their three area teams with families where there is an imminent risk of the children coming into care; and they investigate complaints and referrals immediately and take appropriate action. If the need should arise they secure the removal of a child to a place of safety. The other part of the preventive work is carried out by the separate team of officers who work with families with social problems, arrange rent guarantees and manage and collect rents in the temporary and immediate houses. Since the passage of the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 this work has developed rapidly and separately; the rent guarantee system has grown and material aid and practical help and advice are given by the officers. While the extent and quality of the work done by this team must be commended, the inspectors consider that the team should not be further developed as a separate unit but that the officers should join the area teams so that work with families can be linked more closely with the work with children in care. The senior preventive officer is capable and well known throughout the county and could continue to specialise on preventive work as a headquarters consultant.

Co-ordination and co-operation with other departments

59. Relations with other agencies, both local authority and voluntary, appeared to be generally cordial and to result for the most part in satisfactory liaison. Co-ordinating committees are organised by the department and meet in nine centres of the county at two-month intervals. They are attended by representatives of other departments and of voluntary societies. In Poole there is no co-ordinating committee at officer level, but there is a joint committee on problem and homeless families in which, under the chairmanship of Lady Digby, three members of the children's committee meet

three members of Poole Borough Council. There appears to be a good working relationship between the police and the children's department, and an appreciation by each of the other's responsibilities.

Residential accommodation

60. Between 1948 and 1954 the authority closed several children's homes and reduced the number of places from 250 to 58. Since then the demands on the service have changed and the present number of places in children's homes (63) is insufficient for Dorset's needs. The authority have made proposals, which have been agreed by the Home Office, for the provision of 33 additional places. Inspectors consider that still more places will be required if the needs of children in care are to be met and that the authority should provide a further 30 to 35 places, i.e., sufficient in all for approximately a quarter of the children in care. Special attention should be given to the needs of young children and groups of brothers and sisters received into care for short periods.

Boarding-out

61. 301 children or approximately 60 per cent of children in care are living in foster homes. The inspectors visited a representative cross-section of foster homes, 43 in all.

62. Inspectors saw a good number of foster homes where children appeared well cared for and where foster parents were encouraging the children's parents to visit and to keep in touch with them. Inspectors were impressed particularly by the placement of severely handicapped children in foster homes where the foster parents were caring for them with great devotion and were attending to all the children's needs. They formed the opinion that in Dorset, as in other parts of the country, there is abundant goodwill with a generous spirit of social service.

63. Some weaknesses came to notice. Inspectors found that children had to be separated from their brothers and sisters, that some children were experiencing a number of moves and that some foster mothers, particularly the panel foster mothers, with whom the county have a contract, were over-burdened; one foster mother caring for very young children was seriously over-burdened. A few of the foster homes were of a low physical standard although in other respects these homes were meeting the child's particular needs. The matching of child to foster home appeared to have been lacking in skill in some cases and a requirement of the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations, that a report should be made in writing on the likelihood of the foster home meeting the child's needs, is not being observed.

64. While some of the child care officers showed high professional skill in their work, it was particularly noticeable that some of the unqualified officers did not reach this standard and needed better supervision than they were receiving. With an unprofessional approach went a lack of awareness. Careful and conscientious visiting is not enough when awareness of risks of all kinds is undeveloped. Inspectors came to the conclusion that supervision of case-work should include an occasional visit by senior officers to all foster homes. One senior officer in Dorset is already making such visits in his area.

65. The investigation of prospective foster homes is carefully carried out. Two references and the name of the family doctor are required and no foster home can be used without the approval of the committee.

66. Statutory visits are made within the required intervals. Senior officers are responsible for ensuring that the visits are made and reports written. A satisfactory system of check is in force. Reports of visits vary in quality according to the ability and awareness of the officers ; some reports are very good, while others are more superficial.

67. The progress reviews of boarded-out children are made at the required six-month interval but the arrangements need to be adapted to the changes in the organisation of the department so that the responsible senior officer takes part.

68. The arrangements for the completion of the foster parents' statutory agreement are still not satisfactory and a number had been delayed possibly because of pressure of work in the records office. The child care officers should take on this duty and guide the foster parents in the completion of the agreement ; a check will have to be made in the records office.

Use of voluntary homes

69. Dorset makes greater use of voluntary homes than any neighbouring county. Over half of the placements in them are of Roman Catholic children, usually members of large families. All the voluntary homes are outside the county and the Roman Catholic homes are particularly distant. There can be little doubt that the extensive use of voluntary homes is influenced by the authority's inadequate amount of residential accommodation.

Adoption work

70. The department has acted as an adoption agency since January 1960. A senior officer has special responsibility for adoption work ; she is well suited to her duties and is interested in refining the techniques used in the placement of children. Investigations made by the department are carried out thoroughly and conscientiously and all placements have to be approved by the committee. Inspectors formed the opinion that the work reaches a good and satisfactory standard and that confidence may be placed in the department.

Medical arrangements

71. The medical inspector's summary of arrangements is as follows :—

"It is considered that the children in the care of Dorset County Council, both those boarded out and those in residential homes, receive the necessary medical care and medical supervision. The administrative system of ensuring this medical supervision is working well. Doctors' recommendations are carried out through the general practitioner and child care officers' follow-up to ensure that all that is needed is done. Liaison between the children's department and the county medical officers' department is satisfactory."

Summary of conclusions in the boy's case, and appraisal of general child care arrangements

72. *The boy's case*

- (a) The boy's placing in the foster home followed careful consideration by the council; omissions to observe certain of the statutory requirements are not considered to be significant in relation to subsequent events (para. 25).
- (b) The number of visits of supervision was well in excess of the statutory minimum (para. 26).
- (c) Written reports of visits disclosed nothing which could be related to matters which came to light after the boy had left the foster home (although two visits were not reported on in writing) (para. 27).
- (d) The boy was medically examined annually; the reports to the council disclosed nothing untoward, although it is now known that an injury to the boy's penis was seen at the examination in 1961 (para. 15).
- (e) The boy was under the supervision of professionally qualified officers and their reports show that supervision was conscientious and responsible; expert advice was taken whenever behaviour difficulties were reported (para. 29).
- (f) Reports repeatedly refer to the boy having his own bedroom (para. 31).
- (g) The youth who injured the boy was well known to the council and there was nothing to suggest that he was a potential risk to the boy. Reassuring psychiatric advice was given after an isolated incident in 1959 (paras. 37 and 38).
- (h) The delay in reporting the case to the children's committee was most regrettable (para. 39).
- (i) The Home Office should ask local authorities to ensure that doctors are fully aware of the information required in reports of medical examinations of boarded-out children (para. 42).

Appraisal of the general child care arrangements

73. In general, the quality of the field work in child care in Dorset reaches a good standard. The child care officers, under the competent direction of the Children's Officer, work hard and give unstintingly of their time. At least three additional child care officers are, however, needed. Inspectors were particularly impressed by the skilful placement of severely handicapped children in foster homes where they are well cared for. In Dorset, as elsewhere, foster parents make an invaluable contribution to the good care of children. In addition to its other duties the children's department has taken on the responsibility of acting as an adoption agency. Inspectors found that the adoption work is carried out with due care and regard for sound principles.

74. However, as in many other authorities, the number of child care officers without a professional qualification has increased in recent years with the growth in the responsibilities and size of the department. The

standard of the child care work depends on the quality of supervision which these officers receive. The arrangements are sound and some of the supervision is excellent.

75. The authority are placed at a disadvantage in providing for the needs of all the children in care because of a serious shortage of children's homes. The shortage may have led to the use of foster homes for some children who would be better placed in a children's home; some foster mothers have been over-burdened and some brothers and sisters have had to be separated at a time when they needed each other most.

76. The administration of the department is generally good, and effective safeguards have been incorporated into the organisation. Records are maintained efficiently but more clerical staff is needed. The field work is based on a sound territorial organisation of responsibilities. The organisation introduced in June 1965 is still developing and should now be extended to provide a more locally-based service in the centres of population and particularly in Poole. The Dorset children's department has accepted and developed with vigour its new responsibilities for preventive work but the time has come now for the preventive work to be linked more closely on a local basis with the work with children in care.

JOAN D. COOPER,
Chief Inspector.

Children's Department,
Horseferry House.

5th May 1966.





HOME OFFICE

Dorset County Council Child Care Service

Report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by the Chief Inspector, Children's Department, Home Office



LONDON: HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

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CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>
Introduction	1 to 3
The boy's case	4 to 43
General review of Dorset's child care service	44 to 71
Summary of conclusions in the boy's case, and general appraisal ...	72 to 76